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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BASRAH 000056

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SUBJECT: BASRAH OPERATIONS COMMAND GENERAL MOHAMMED ON SECURITY PROGRESS

REF: BASRAH 036

BASRAH 00000056 001.2 OF 003

CLASSIFIED BY: Howell Howard, Director, Regional Embassy Office Basrah, Dept. of State.

REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Lieutenant General Mohammed Jawad Huwaidi, Commander of the Basrah Operations Command (BOC), told REO Basrah May 24 that Basrah is now 70-80% secure. He expected operations to continue through the summer and posited that there was greater cooperation between Basrawis and the ISF. Mohammed also admitted that the police force has improved since COK, but there were still criminal and militia elements within the ranks.

Though acknowledging that the support of the tribes had been important during the initial days of COK, he labeled them disorganized and was indifferent to their complaints that the GOI has failed to provide them with resources. Mohammad outlined an ambitious border security plan to stem Iran's "pervasive influence". He predicted a rise in politically motivated violence during the run-up to the elections and denied Sadrist assertions that they had been singled out for persecution by the GOI and ISF. END SUMMARY.

#### GENERAL SECURITY

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¶12. (C) During a meeting held at the Basrah Regional Embassy Office on May 24, Lt. General Mohammed Jawad Huwaidi, the commander of the Basrah Operations Command (BOC), assessed Basrah province to be 70-80% secure as a result of the COK operation. Now that Basrah City was essentially secure, the campaign had moved to Qurnah in northern Basrah, where Mohammed said operations had gone well. Smaller COK operations were ongoing in other parts of the city and province. Mohammed said that in general his forces were adequately supplied, explicitly contradicting reports from REO contacts that IA troops were lacking weapons and other resources. He said that wheeled armor would be helpful but he was not insistent. (Note: His predecessor General Mohan had constantly complained to REO that wheeled armor was essential to his operations. End Note.) Mohammed made a point of mentioning that the UK had given a substantial amount of money to General Mohan to purchase weapons for the IA, and he wondered where the weapons were. Looking to the future, Mohammed acknowledged the importance of turning attention to security for private investors, and he committed to providing this security.

¶13. (C) Commenting on a VBIED attack at Basrah University, Mohammed revealed that he believed the intended target was acting Justice Minister Safa al-Safi, who was tasked by Prime Minister (PM) Maliki to oversee, on the ground in Basrah, the distribution of \$100 million in emergency reconstruction funds; the ISF subsequently uncovered a small cache of weapons at the

university. Deeming this an isolated incident, Mohammed did not believe it heralded a return of militia activity. He also said that raids were ongoing, and he expected COK operations to continue through the summer. Highlighting the improved security situation in the province, Mohammed said that it has resulted in better cooperation between the ISF and Basrah's residents, which in turn has led to better intelligence.

¶4. (C) Mohammed dismissed claims by Sadrists, tribal sheikhs and many other local commentators that the COK was politically motivated and that the ISF has singled out Sadrists while ignoring the activities of other militias, including those linked to ISCI/Badr and Fadhila; he said he "would never look at it this way." Declaring that the ISF pursued wanted criminals, he added "if there is a warrant, we will arrest them." When pressed by the REO Director, he grudgingly conceded that there may be some truth to the Sadrists' claims, but that he merely executed arrest warrants and was not a judge or prosecutor.

#### POLICE

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¶5. (C) Though acknowledging that the performance of the Iraqi police (IP) had improved since COK began, Mohammed cautioned that there were still criminal and militia elements within the ranks. He also said that he was reluctant to let them operate independently and insisted that the Iraqi Army accompany the IP on operations. Mohammed acknowledged that while the IA has enough supplies, perhaps the IP did not. He compared the generally sufficient IA supply chain with the IP system where the IP were given an allowance to live on the economy; he allowed that perhaps these allowances were not given out in a timely fashion. He mentioned concern over recent reports of IP stealing from homes and drinking alcohol on the job.

¶6. (C) Acknowledging the positive contribution of the tribes, particularly in the early days of the COK, Mohammed seemed skeptical of their current efforts, calling the Bani Malik tribe

BASRAH 00000056 002.2 OF 003

and others "unorganized." He appeared indifferent to their complaints about unfulfilled promises of material and financial support from the GOI. In a telling anecdote that may have revealed his true feelings about tribal engagement, he shared that when the PM had asked him during the initial days of COK if the tribes were well trained, he replied to the PM that they were well trained to be "gangsters and thieves." (Note: Mohammed did not seem knowledgeable about the details of the tribal support battalions. He clearly had not had contact with Salam al-Maliki, the main organizer of the Qurnah battalion. The tribal battalions are not under Mohammed's direct command, but fall under the MOI. End Note.)

#### BORDERS

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¶7. (C) Arguing that securing the borders was the only way to stem Iran's "pervasive influence" in southern Iraq, Mohammed outlined an ambitious plan to reinforce Basrah's borders. He stressed that Basrah was the main staging point for weapons smuggling to the rest of Iraq. Mohammed related that in 1979 he was in southern Iraq on military duty and that porosity of the border was the same problem. In the coming weeks, he hoped to enlist the aid of several State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in Basrah so that he could use their resources and equipment to create a series of berms and fortifications that would resemble those on Iraq's southern border with Kuwait; he had a meeting scheduled with the SOE directors. Mohammed noted that he had also asked the U.S. military for ICERP funds for this purpose.

¶8. (C) Coalition plans to ramp up the Shalamshah Border Crossing were important but only a piece of what was needed. (Note: Mohammed also did not appear knowledgeable about Shalamshah. End Note.) He revealed that he was contemplating the relocation of segments of the population residing in small villages along the river in the al Faw peninsula and possibly other areas along the border, all in order to staunch the flow of weapons smuggling. When REO director pointed out that forcibly

relocating villagers was often a politically charged exercise with negative humanitarian consequences, Mohammed appeared unconcerned. He replied that the numbers of people involved were small and that he was certain that villagers were involved in smuggling. Mohammed also indicated concern about Maysan's borders with Iran and the need to halt the flow of weapons into that province.

¶ 19. (C) Acknowledging that in the marsh areas physical barriers would be impossible, Mohammed planned to increase waterborne patrols and, more importantly, human intelligence gathering among the Marsh Arabs. REO Director wondered aloud whether the Iraqi navy and coast guard would be up to this task, mentioning other countries, such as Peru, where most of the nation's navy was a freshwater fleet patrolling its inland borders. Mohammed appeared lukewarm but agreed that he would need more patrol boats and trained, armed servicemen to make his plan effective. He also mentioned that in the past the French had supplied a radar system for the marsh area that was helpful.

#### ELECTIONS AND SECURITY

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¶ 10. (C) Though Mohammed revealed that he hoped to maintain his current troop strength through the elections, he candidly admitted that he expected the level of violence to increase in the run-up to the elections, stating that August to October would be the "period of assassinations -- but that this was normal." Despite this grim outlook, he asserted that his forces were prepared to ensure the security of the Voter Registration Centers (VRC), and that they also have a detailed plan for maintaining security during the elections. His security assessment of the VRCs was in progress. (Embassy Note: UNAMI states that the VRC security assessment has since been completed.) Mohammed described his planned 200 to 300 meter security zone around the VRCs, with an inner ring of IP and an outer ring of IA. Within this zone only official government vehicles would be allowed. He expressed concern that his best force, the First Brigade, would be sent to Amarah for eventual operations there. (Note: He refers to QRF1, a brigade-sized element of the 1st IA Division, that had been brought to Basrah for COK and that since this meeting did depart for the North. Many observers also credit QRF1 as being the best performing brigade during COK. End Note.)

¶ 11. (S) BIO NOTES: Shia Mohammed was Commander of the 3rd Brigade (Bde), 8th IA Division based near Al Kut, Wasit, where he is from. In September 2007 he and his Bde were relocated to BASRA, to become 1st Bde of the newly formed 14th IA Division. In April he was appointed Commander of the 14th Division, based in Basrah. While in 2007 there were allegations that Mohammed's brigade looted and burned Sunni homes in an operation against insurgents, prompting a request for investigation by MNF, PM Maliki ordered officers involved in that operation, including

BASRAH 00000056 003.2 OF 003

Mohammed to be promoted. While meetings by MNDSE have included a few negative impressions, the overall impression has been of professionalism, organization and determination to bring security to Basrah.

¶ 12. (C) COMMENT: General Mohammed has continued his reputation (Reftel) among Coalition observers as a relatively detailed and careful planner. He has clearly given a lot of thought to issues such as border control, election security and reform of the police. He has a frank, considered manner and does not appear prone to the emotional outbursts of his predecessor General Mohan. REO assesses him as a good partner for achieving security in Basrah province.  
HOWARD